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ORPHIC ECHOES IN MODERN LYRIC
POETRY: ERNST LISSAUER'S
*DER STROM*¹

Most potent, perhaps, of all the influences that have left an impress upon later dreams concerning the essence and meaning of life, is the influence exerted down the long ages by the thought and symbolism of the Orphic Mystery. The Orphic Mystery was the crystallization in ritual of man's mystic realization of the identity of his turbulent transitory Self with the divine eternal All; and later Greek philosophy is only a farther development of early Orphic speculations. Recent appreciative reinterpretation of Pre-Socratic philosophy has shown that the mood of passionate subjective pantheism—or rather panentheism—which characterized those early philosophers, and which is always contemporaneous with fervid lyric expression, is allied in spirit to the mood dominant in the days of the Renaissance, and again in the days of German Romanticism. It is likewise the mood—growing in the world to-day—which forms the basis of our modern vitalistic monism, with its buoyant affirmation of the world-will's tireless creative energy, and its strong sense of the kinship, change, and re-embodiment of all phenomenal things. And so this world-old thought, this world-old symbolism, is finding in present-day poetry renewed expression and reinterpretation.

In most of the poets the motives appear more or less fugitively, and, except, perhaps, in Wille and Stephan George, are not organized into a definite scheme; but in Lissauer's *Der Strom* we find a definite framework of philosophic thought underlying and organizing the collection of poems. The volume gives typical, clear, and systematized expression to these

world-old themes, and it is one of the most beautiful and significant volumes of lyric poetry published in late years. It is the work of a mature and poised, yet passionate poet, whose peculiar temper and philosophy of life and things—suffusing and at the same time focalizing the collection—gives significance and purpose to all the poems in their relation to one another and to the thought and mood of the whole. While a definite plan holds them together, each is also effective in itself.

Lissauer's work shows that harmony between the centrifugal and centripetal tendencies, between the dynamic and the static, which is the ideal alike of life and of art. While abandoning himself to Dionysiac enthusiasm and to a consciousness of the abounding fulness of life which pours itself out unwearyingly into endless manifoldness, he is no less a votary of Apolline unity, concentration, and control. His boundless 'one-and-all' feeling is caught and fixed in definite sensuous images, as well as in the definite plot which organizes the collection; yet the constant struggle of his passionate pantheism for escape from the limiting form gives to his work suggestiveness and a subtle, live fluidity of line free from all rigidity.

This poetry is in the finest sense symbolic: fugitively symbolic in a way, yet nevertheless quite definite and unmistakable in mood and meaning. Perfectly clear is the central symbol, that of the stream, the image with which the book opens and closes. The choice and the interpretation of this symbol illustrates Lissauer's ego-centric and yet cosmic starting-point. "Die Welt und mich, mich und die Welt" is written on his banner. The stream it is which binds to one another all parts of the earth: the water-stream on the one hand, thought of chiefly as the far-wandering warming Gulf Stream and as the fertilizing Nile; and the earth-stream on the other hand, the 'open road' which flows loudly and far out into the land. But the stream is the symbol, also, of the typical poet, all-embracing and blithe; it is the symbol, indeed, of Lissauer himself, the poet-priest; as—having sent his soul abroad hungry for experience, caught now and again in the turmoil of passion, of sorrow;

Warkeworth, master of Peterhouse, in 1481. Cf. M. R. James, *Catalogue of Manuscripts of Peterhouse*, p. 236, No. 201.

Details concerning the various extant mss. of the romances in Burley's library are for the most part omitted, as the writer hopes shortly to publish a study of the romances named in medieval catalogues of English libraries.

¹ Ernst Lissauer, *Der Strom*. Jena, 1912.

having found lasting joy, finally, in the possession of wife and child while remaining attuned none the less to the struggle and hunger of humanity—he thus grows gradually from youth to manhood, dedicating himself ever more consciously and joyously to his life-work, and traveling steadily ‘oceanward’ confident and unafraid. So he sings² of the stream and of his art:

Wie er wandernd Meere an Meere, Länder an
Länder bindet,

Also treibe ich . . .

Umarmend Ufer, Inseln, Länder, Meere, viele,
viele.

Vertrauen

Und eins ist not: sei gläubig! Spende
Dich dem Geschick wie ein Segel dem Reisewind!
Fürchte nicht fremde Gelände!
Sei deiner Zukunft gläubig, wie ein Strom dem
Meer, in das er rinnt!

This theme—the story of an artist’s development and of his world-saving mission—is the old theme of the Romanticists; and it is also a fitting tradition which has haunted the ages and which harks back finally to the Orphic Mystery with its tale of Orpheus, prototype of all singers. But not only does the central theme of the book reflect world-old mystic thought; Lissauer reinterprets all the chief dreams and symbols found by man in his earliest gropings for an explanation of life and things, and he makes them vital and valid for us to-day.

Most pervasive of them all is the dream—the more than dream—of the intimate oneness of all things with one another and with the great all, now, and in the past, and in the future. Closely related to this, the most fundamental of all dreams, is the weird dream of the never-ending round of restless phenomenal transformation that takes place as the eternal ‘soul’ enters body after body, changing, developing, finding release at last from the wheel of sense-birth; and this dream of birth and

re-birth, and final release is in its turn hardly to be separated from that other weird, wistful dream of the soul’s outgo from a golden homeland; of the doom laid upon it to wander untold ages long, down the abyss of time, over the field of shows, vaguely reminiscent, ever and anon, of the primal glory to which it will find a late golden return.

Nachgefühl

Oft ist es mir, ich war vormals ein Stern unter
Sternen,
In das Gesetz der Himmel eingeschlossen von
bannender Kraft,
Aber gelöst aus der seligen Haft,
In Fall
Durch das All,
Reise ich rastlos von Fernen zu Fernen.

Irr auf die Erde verschlagen,
Mensch unter Menschen, leb’ ich nun meine Zeit.
Durch wimmelnde Mengen, von Taumel getragen,
Schimmernd,
Zertrümmernd,
Stürz’ ich in jähe Unendlichkeit.

Yet Lissauer does not dwell overmuch on this more troubled mood; he is too healthy an optimist, and too thoroughly a monist, not to affirm buoyantly the ‘here and now’ which, after all, seems intimately identical with the eternal. “Mitten im Tag wittre ich Ewigkeit,” he says. In music—the great ‘magical’ panacea of the Mystery—he finds release from the disturbing problem of the finite, and in his poems on music and musicians he dreams ecstasically of spherulic music and the basic harmony of things.

Heiligend fließt Musik mir im beglückten Blut.
Es rührt mir an die Sterne eine weite Kühle. . .
Durch meine klingenden Hände
Jubilierend braust Musik der Welt.

In this connection the motive of ‘initiation’—of the granting of final ‘knowledge’—is suggested. For when, troubled, he climbs high up into a belfry, the solemn sounding of the bell reveals to him the great Mystery.

Mein Haupt lauscht
Und füllt sich schwer mit dem bebenden Klange,
Und ehern berauscht
Wird es aufgetan von der hämmernden Kunde
Und vernimmt alles Geschehn in der tönenden
einen Sekunde.

²“Wie der Golfstrom.” Compare further “An den Nil,” “Lobgesang,” “Zuversicht,” “Grabsschrift für einen Dichter.”

Aussummt

Die Glocke und ist verstummt,—

Erwacht aus dem Schlag,

Wissend schau' ich erstaunt auf den verworrenen
Tag.

Earth, water, fire, air—these four 'elements' that have played so conspicuous a part in religious and philosophic tradition—are fundamental notes, also, in Lissauer's thought and symbolism.

The significance of water has already been noted. The earth he pictures as the great solid stage over which life's varied never-ending show passes; and he bids his soul travel forth over it tirelessly.

Even more important than water and earth in his scheme of symbolism, are fire and air, or light and wind. These two he calls his progenitors. They are symbols of the dualistic principles of life, of that polarity which is life's fundamental phenomenon.

Herkunft

Wer hat mich gezeugt,
Dass ich bin voll Gewalt und Flamme?
Welche Amme
Hat mich mit Atem und Glut gesäugt?
Auf einer Pappel schwankendem Stamme,
Dünkt mich, wohnt' ich als Kind,
Ob mir fuhr Wolke und Blitz,
Oft rauschte ein Wehen gelind
Und wiegte den wiegenden Sitz.

Der ich bin, wie ich ward in Stunde und Jahr,
Licht
Breit auf dem Angesicht,
Von Wind durchstreift Stirne und Haar,
Von geschauter, gespürter Welt zu strahlender
Lohe entfacht,
Von Sturm die vollströmenden Adern durchwühlt,
Das selige Blut brausend in Taumel und Ton,
Von Flammen durchzuckt, doch von scharf auf-
springenden Winden gekühlt,—
Ich bin des Feuers und des Windes eingeborner
Sohn.

Fire, with which he feels himself to have formerly been more directly one, is the vital power which quickens and impels his exuberant blood. Yet the fire in the blood seems less lasting to him, after all, than the wind-soul which he feels to be the inmost essence of himself as of all things, subtly, closely one, as it is, with

the great universal world-breath. This great universal world-breath, all-embracing air, never-dying, wander-hungry wind, he celebrates unwearingly. More than any poet before him he sings of the wind and its wanderings; and the group of poems on the wind is one of the most striking and beautiful parts of the book.

Beautiful, too, and well carried out, is the conception of his individual wind-soul. He sends it forth to travel everywhither and to make all things its own even as does the world-soul.

O du meine Seele, die du beglückst mein Blut,
meinen Leib, all mein atmendes Sein,
Du fliegst auf in die Welt, und die Welt wird mein,
Menschen und Fluten und Felsen und Sterne,—

O du meine Seele, wie fühl' ich dich reisen!

O du meine Seele, du sollst mir niemals wieder
kehren!

Du sollst wandernd wie Wind dich mit Samen von
Welt beschweren.

But when, grief-stricken, he sits alone, suddenly he feels his far-traveling wind-soul close by him, his best and truest friend.

Atem weht mich an, ich bin nicht allein,
Weiter wird die Stube, heller wird der Schein.
Leise um mich schattet ein betreuend Du,
Meine Seele, ich höre, du sprichst mir zu.

And for a while they nestle closely to one another, keeping the wind from the restless world without shut away.

O du meine Seele wie sind wir selig zu zwein!

Beschlossen ist das Haus, verloschen ist das Licht,
Selig im Dunkeln liegen und lauschen wir,—
Wind aus der Welt will herein zu mir und dir.

Such, then, are the fundamental notes struck by Lissauer in this volume. One is reminded of Orphic and Stoic and Romantic thought, of Nietzsche, of Whitman. But who can wish to emphasize influences where every word, every image, every thought, bears on it the seal of a personal temper and a personal vision of life and living? And yet, although so personal in his vision, Lissauer is at the same time an

embodiment—as indeed every real poet should be—of the dominant mood of his age: that mood of buoyant affirmation which characterizes our modern ‘monism.’

And the outer form in which these thoughts and moods and experiences have found expression is equally individual. Rime is retained; but the rhythm manifests a vibrant life and variety which can be gained only by utmost freedom from conventional standards of verse. The metre is at one time pulsatingly expressive of ecstatic abandon; is at other times delicately sensitive; again, it is permeated by a sense of restraint, or rolls along, ample, sustained, majestic.

Thus Lissauer’s *Der Strom* is in thought as in form one of the finest achievements of modern lyric poetry; and it is rich in emotional suggestion just because the fundamental motives and symbols are the world-old themes which have ever been dear to men: symbols which have haunted dreamers as prefiguring, in myth, the final ‘knowledge’ manifest to man at the end of his mystic quest.

LOUISE MALLINCKRODT KUEFFNER.

Vassar College.

THE ORDER OF MONOSYLLABLES AND DISSYLLABLES IN ALLITERATION

Jespersen in his second edition of *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (p. 232 f.) says: “In combinations of a monosyllable and a dissyllable by means of *and*, the usual practice is to place the short word first. . . . Thus we say ‘bread and butter,’ not ‘butter and bread’; further: bread and water, milk and water, cup and saucer, wind and weather, head and shoulders, by fits and snatches, from top to bottom, rough and ready, rough and tumble, free and easy, dark and dreary, high and mighty, up and doing.”

Professor Scott, in an article in *Modern Language Notes*, XXVIII, 237 f., contends

that this statement does not give a true impression of English usage. He says: “It implies, if it does not say outright, that rhythm groups of the type ‘butter and bread’ occur in English but rarely. It also suggests that such phrases lack idiomatic force. I submit that just the contrary is true; phrases of this type occur frequently, and they are strongly idiomatic.” Professor Scott appends a list of 262 phrases taken at random, and finds that 42 per cent. are of the “unusual,” that is, of the “butter and bread” type.

I have classified alliterating monosyllabic-dissyllabic and dissyllabic-monosyllabic combinations. My material I have found in Hans Willert’s *Die alliterierenden Formeln der englischen Sprache* (Halle, 1911). Willert has gathered under various headings over 600 pages of alliterating phrases from the works of over one hundred authors. Such a stupendous *Opus* does not of course exhaust the alliterating groups in English, and some even of the fairly common groups are lacking, as one reviewer has shown. However, his lists seem to me to be inclusive and representative enough to permit of their statistical use for or against Jespersen. I shall follow Willert’s classification, cite a few phrases of each class, and then give the numerical relation of the two rhythmic types: (1) Words of the same Root; (2) Nouns; (3) Adjectives; (4) Verbs. I shall give them in alphabetic order, treating the vowel-alliterations together.

(1) WORDS OF THE SAME ROOT

Bread and butter type

arms and armour	foul and filthy
beds and bedding	gleam and glimmer
climb and clamber	god and goddess
duke and duchess	goose and gander
faults and failings	host and hostess
feed and foster	judge and jury
float and flutter	just and unjust

Butter and bread type

blossom and bloom

Total in Willert 17 in first type; 4 in second type.